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War Food Administration
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Nutrition Programs Branch

Case History
of a
Nutrition Committee Activity

MOBILIZATION OF BUTLER COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA

FOR BETTER HEALTH THROUGH

BETTER NUTRITION

Butler County, in the western part of Pennsylvania, lies directly north of Allegheny County in which the "Steel City" of Pittsburg is located.

Butler County had a total population of 87,590 people in 1940, of which 35,000 live in cities and towns. Most of the people in Butler County are white, the few Negro families, however, are always considered when plans are made for the community. They receive their portion of Community Chest funds and Negro children have equal advantages with white children in the public schools.

The chief occupations of the people in Butler County are agriculture and industry. Butler County farming, as all Pennsylvania farming, is characterized by diversification. Butler County farmers grow potatoes, corn, winter wheat, oats, rye, hay, apples, peaches and a few grapes. The sale of dairy products in 1940 amounted to \$2,176,549. On the whole the farmers are thrifty and use their soil well although drainage systems are needed to remove excess water from poorly drained soil on some individual farms and fields.

Before the war stimulated production for defense there were between 80 and 90 industrial plants in the county located chiefly in the town of Butler which has a population of 27,000. The business range of these plants varied from around \$20,000 a year to \$125,000 and up. The war has, of course, greatly increased the industrial output.

The social classes are the usual ones in any good sized American community, although, in Butler County particularly, social classes seem to be based upon community interests rather than upon incomes. As in other communities over the country many of the people entered the factories when they were needed.

The Problem and Its Solution

In May 1941 a group of eighteen home economists, public health nurses, and dietitians recognized that the increase in production required by the war effort had stepped up the tempo of living within the county to a marked degree. They realized that, as far as possible, the diets of everyone would have to be brought up to maximum in order to ward off brain fog, jitters and actual cracking up under strain. The strategy they mapped out was to reach as many individuals as possible through groups already existing for other purposes.

They were encouraged in their plans by the Pennsylvania State Nutrition Council. The State Council influenced them to begin their program of work by organizing as a Butler County Nutrition Council.

Plans were laid, complete in all details. First of all, the eighteen who formed a professional "working group" approached fifty organizations to gain their cooperation. These fifty groups included women's clubs, men's service clubs, Parent-Teachers Associations, Catholic, Jewish and Protestant church groups, Negro congregations, Salvation Army, Medical Society, dental society, hotel and restaurant proprietors, motion picture theaters, newspapers, radio station, Scout troops, Industry and Labor organizations. In presenting the program upon these first contacts each group was asked to appoint a representative to serve on the Butler County Nutrition Council. Practically all responded favorably. Local chairmen were appointed for townships and larger communities.

Then started the educational work of making as many people as possible food value conscious, and helping people know how to practice good nutrition. To popularize the movement several slogans were adopted which caught public interest. Some were borrowed from well-known radio broadcasters. "Health and Nutrition for Defense Preparedness." "Each day in some way, help America."

The Nutrition Council meets to plan activities that need to be undertaken. From the beginning it has constantly been on the alert for ways to extend food and nutrition service to all parts of Butler County. In this its motto is, "We must not rest on our laurels but must be ever up and at it."

All nutrition information given out has been sound as the working group of professionally trained nutritionists took the responsibility for conducting the meetings, demonstrations, radio broadcasts, preparing newspaper articles, pamphlets and illustrative material and selecting movie films. Information and materials were kept simple and practical.

Food demonstrations were keyed to the needs of the groups to whom they were given. For example, low cost dishes were prepared and served to low income groups. A small sum was charged those groups able to pay in order to meet expenses of the demonstrations. The Salvation Army and similar groups were excepted.

The Nutrition Council also worked toward the introduction of school lunches, interpreted point rationing of foods, helped with trays in the Butler County Hospital when labor became scarce, served food to blood donors, influenced an industrial concern employing several thousand men and women to promote better nutrition.

Results

Amazingly large numbers of people have been reached through classes, food demonstrations, radio, newspapers and movies. There has been no exact way to measure results in improved eating habits or food selection and preparation practices.

The County Health Officer reports, however, that milk consumption doubled and attributed the increase to the nutrition study and talks. He listed the County Nutrition Council as an agency promoting good health.

Several additional schools in the county have started the school lunch program.

The County Chairman of the Red Cross and more than 3,000 blood donors praised the Council for the nutritious food served the donors. The Nutrition Council was encouraged to find that half of the donors ate whole wheat bread and asked for milk instead of coffee or tea.

The Superintendent of the hospital stated that when sixty women responded to the emergency call sent out by the chairman of the Nutrition Council to help with trays it did much to publicize nutrition.

The Butler County Federation of Women's Clubs adopted Nutrition as a county project.

One recent outcome has been establishment of a Nutrition Center equipped with stoves and sink which is utilized as a community conservation canteen and nutrition center. Demonstrations and meetings are held here and it provides a place to care for surplus foods.

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The Chairman of the County Nutrition Committee has served as chairman of the Butler Curbstone Canteen which is operated at the local bus terminal on Sundays. From 11:30 A.M. on Sunday until 2 A.M. the following morning, food is served free at the Curbstone Canteen to service men and women. For the 31 Sundays from May, when the Canteen opened, through December, 17 groups in Butler cooperated to serve 11,500 service men and women. To do this, 833 women worked 3332 hours. They were assisted by five men on December 24 because of the Christmas rush.

With a county Nutrition Council composed of representatives of thirty organizations, representing over 3,000 persons, and with a local chairman in each township and all large communities, Butler County has a nutrition set-up ready for any emergency and one that is keeping the people healthier and happier.

